

Belmont Warrant Committee Meeting Minutes

FINAL

May 25, 2010, 6:30 p.m.

Chenery Middle School Community Room

Present: Chair Curtis; Members Allison, Becker, Callanan, Dash, Epstein, Hofmann, Libenson, Lynch, Manjikian, Millane; School Committee Chair Rittenburg

Town Accountant Hagg

Members Absent: Bruschi, McLaughlin, Smith and BOS Chair Jones

The meeting was called to order at 6:37 pm by Chair Curtis.

Chair Curtis began by noting that there is only a single item on the agenda: opining on a Town Meeting motion that would amend Article 5 by adding \$16,683 from free cash, thus making the Town Clerk's salary \$76,683.

Town Meeting Amendment Regarding the Town Clerk Salary

Chair Curtis summarized one of the rationales for the amending motion: that the WC should have looked at a salary study done in 2003 of senior management in Belmont in constructing its salary recommendation – and that the failure to consider the 2003 study constituted a process failure. The Town Clerk and Treasurer positions, the motion suggests, should have been graded at a level 18.

Member Epstein, who had been in charge of the salary review process that led to the WC-recommended salary figures (including the \$60K figure for Town Clerk), reviewed the history of that process: It's true that we did not consider the 2003 salary study. When the Town Clerk announced her retirement in January, a large field of candidates emerged (one candidate being the Assistant Town Clerk) and we wanted to address the salary, as the WC makes the salary recommendation for elected officials. The question was how to do this objectively? To do so, we looked at entry-level salaries for Town Clerks in other communities in Massachusetts (specifically communities with a population of 20-30K and within 30 miles of Belmont).

We looked (Member Epstein continued) at what the market was paying, and gathered a comprehensive data set. The median salary was about \$57-\$60 K. On that basis, we concluded that \$60K was an appropriate starting point, as it reflected the market number. Each candidate was fully aware of the recommended salary, since the recommendation was made at the end of February. No one said that this recommendation was inappropriate. Regarding the level 18 consideration, I don't know what assumptions went in to making it a level 18, and market data trumps data that is not based on market criteria.

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- Member Hofmann said that this salary (\$60K) is too low in this specific case, as the newly-elected Town Clerk has a lot of experience – and experience makes a difference. We paid Ms. Keefe \$62K in 1999.

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- Chair Curtis noted that the WC premise was intentionally neutral as to who was running and who won.

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- Member Lynch said he applauds the subcommittee’s work (i.e., the process that Member Epstein outlined) and he added that the WC voted overwhelmingly to support their recommendation. The motion before the WC, he said, offers one piece of information we did not have in February and the question to be asked is: does this information justify changing our recommendation? Lynch said he would suggest it does not. He suggested that the WC stand by its decision as there are no new facts that warrant a change.

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- Member Allison said she agreed, and added that this would not be an appropriate use of cash reserves. We are telling the voters we have no money and need an override, yet we are being asked to support a transfer that has not one benefit for elementary school children or library users (for Sunday hours) or for the town as a whole (e.g., with tree planting). This transfer would benefit one person and would not bode well with the unions as we come up on a collective bargaining year. Additionally, the rating agency would find using cash reserves for operating expenses an unsupportable idea. This would clearly be an inappropriate use of cash reserves and, as such, it sends the wrong message to every possible constituency.

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- Member Millane added that the subcommittee looked at the duties and functions of this job and noted that it doesn’t require the skills of treasurer or accountant. Member Dash noted that we live in a totally different world now than in 2003 (i.e., when the salary study was done). To do this sends a horrible message. If we can’t make small cuts in a salary adjustment, what hope does the override have? The Town Clerk knew the salary when she ran for the position, and it is a fair salary for a ministerial position, Dash added.

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- *Member Dash moved:* To vote to recommend *unfavorable* action to Town Meeting regarding Mr. Reardon’s motion amending Article 5.

- The motion passed 11 to 1.

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- Member Hofmann moved to adjourn at 7:06 pm.

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- Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio
- WC Recording Secretary